



Karen Bleier/AFP via Getty Images

Gun violence in America, in 17 maps and charts

by German Lopez on August 26, 2015

America is an exceptional country when it comes to guns. It's **one of the few countries** in which the right to bear arms is constitutionally protected, and presidential candidates in other nations don't **cook bacon with guns**. But America's relationship with guns is unique in another crucial way: Among developed nations, the US is far and away the most violent — in large part due to the easy

access many Americans have to firearms. These charts and maps show what that violence looks like compared with the rest of the world, why it happens, and why it's such a tough problem to fix.

America's unique problem with gun violence

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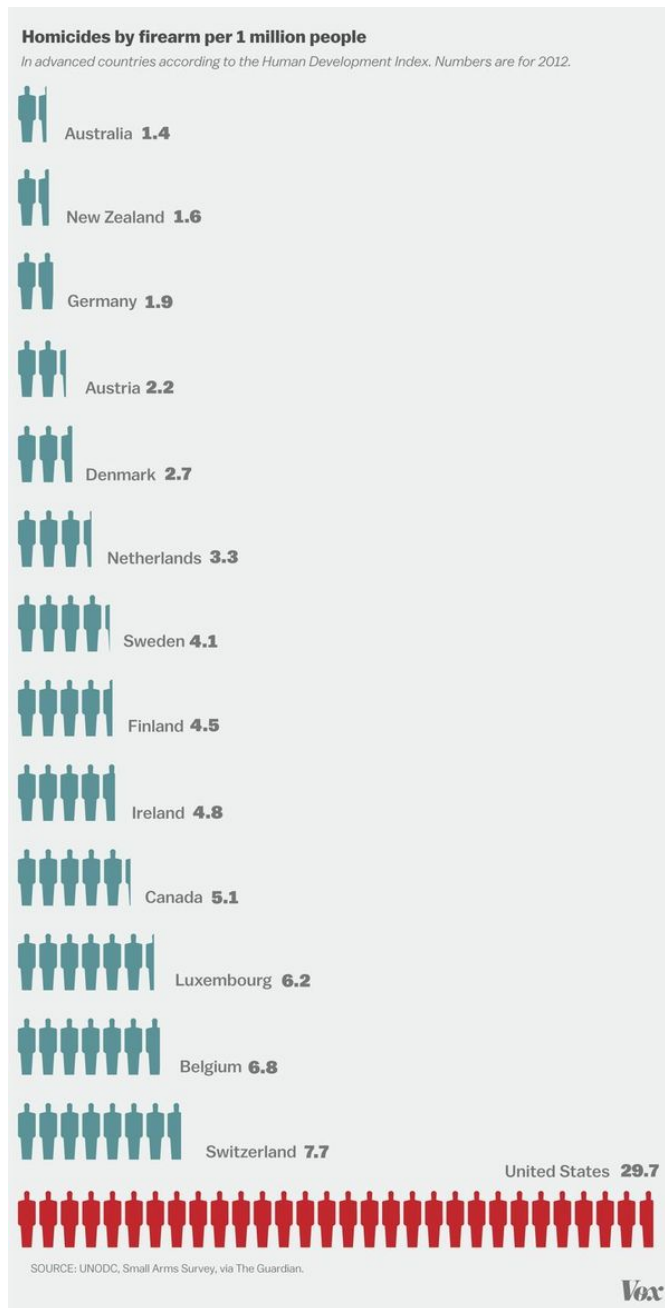
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This chart, compiled using United Nations data collected by the Guardian's Simon Rogers (<http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/homicides-ownership-world-list#data>), shows that America far and away leads other developed countries when it

comes to gun-related homicides. Why? Extensive reviews of the research by the Harvard School of Public Health's Injury Control Center (<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hicrc/firearms-research/guns-and-death/>) suggest the answer is pretty simple: The US is an outlier on gun violence because it has way more guns than other developed nations.

Image credit: Javier Zarracina/Vox

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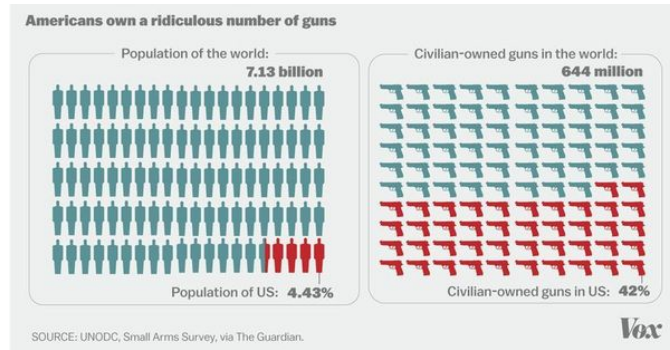


Image credit: Javier Zarracina/Vox

America's mass shooting epidemic

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There
have
been
at
least
500
mass
shootings
since
Sandy

Hook

In December 2012, a gunman walked into Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, and killed 20 children, six adults, and himself. Since then, there have been at least 885 mass shootings, with shooters killing at least 1,144 people and wounding 3,180

more, as [this map](#) (<http://www.vox.com/a/mass-shootings-sandy-hook>) (click to view the interactive version) shows.

The counts come from the [Mass Shooting Tracker](#) (http://shootingtracker.com/wiki/Main_Page), a crowdsourced database that tracks shootings since 2013. As with any crowdsourced database, it's likely missing some shootings, and some of the shootings are missing details.

The tracker uses a fairly broad definition of "mass shooting": It includes not just shootings in which four or more people were murdered, but shootings in which four or more people were shot at all. The database's organizers explained their reasoning on their website: "For instance, in 2012 Travis Steed and others shot 18 people total. Miraculously, he only killed one. Under the incorrect definition of mass shooting, that event

would not be considered a mass shooting! Arguing that 18 people shot during one event is not a mass shooting is absurd."

Even under this broad definition, it's worth noting that mass shootings make up a tiny portion of America's firearm deaths, which totaled more than 32,000 (<http://www.vox.com/cards/gun-violence-facts/gun-suicide-homicide-common>) in 2013.

Image credit: [Soo Oh/Vox](http://www.vox.com/a/mass-shootings-sandy-hook) (<http://www.vox.com/a/mass-shootings-sandy-hook>).

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There is a mass shooting almost every day in America

Whenever a mass shooting occurs, supporters of gun rights often argue that it's inappropriate to bring up political debates about gun control in the aftermath of a tragedy. For example, Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, a strong supporter of gun rights, criticized (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/09/18-is-not-the-time-for-new-gun-laws.html>) President Barack Obama for "trying to score cheap political points" when the president mentioned ([<http://www.vox.com/2015/9/4/9183955/gun-violence-statistics>](http://time.com/3926839/president-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

[obama-charleston-transcript/\)](http://www.vox.com/2015/6/17/8802547/mass-shooting-emmanuel-charleston-sc)
gun control after a [mass shooting in Charleston, South Carolina](#) (<http://www.vox.com/2015/6/17/8802547/mass-shooting-emmanuel-charleston-sc>).

But if this argument is followed to its logical end, then it will *never* be the right time to discuss mass shootings, as Christopher Ingraham pointed out at the [Washington Post](#) (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/now-averaging-more-than-one-mass-shooting-per-day-in-2015/>). Under the Mass Shooting Tracker's definition of mass shootings, America has nearly one mass shooting a day. So if lawmakers are forced to wait for a time when there isn't a mass shooting to talk gun control, they could find themselves waiting for a very long time.

Image credit: [Christopher Ingraham/Washington Post](#) (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2015/08/26/were-now-averaging-more-than-one-mass-shooting-per-day-in-2015/>).

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2015/08/26/were-now-averaging-more-than-one-mass-shooting-per-day-in-2015/>

More guns, more violence

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Using data from a

study in ***Pediatrics*** (<http://www.pediatricsdigest.mobi/content/116/3/e> and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (<http://www.statehealthfacts.org/comparemaptableind=113&cat=2>), [Mother Jones](#) (<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/01/pro-gun-myths-fact-check%20>) put together the chart above that shows states with more guns tend to have far more gun deaths. And it's not just one study. "Within the United States, a wide array of empirical evidence indicates that more guns in a community leads to more homicide," David Hemenway, the Harvard Injury Control Research Center's director, wrote in ***Private Guns, Public Health*** (<http://books.google.com/books?id=iANw1pb4fPAC&pg=PA61&lpg=PA61&dq=david+>

Read more in [Mother Jones's "10 Pro-Gun Myths, Shot Down."](#) (<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/01/pro-gun-myths-fact-check>)

Image credit: [Mother Jones](#) (<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/01/pro->

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**Developed
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Image credit: [Tewksbury Lab \(http://tewksburylab.org/blog/2012/12/gun-violence-and-gun-ownership-lets-look-at-the-data/\)](http://tewksburylab.org/blog/2012/12/gun-violence-and-gun-ownership-lets-look-at-the-data/)

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**States
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tighter
gun**

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deaths](http://www.vox.com/2015/8/24/9183525/gun-control-tighter-gun-control-laws-have-fewer-gun-related-deaths)

When economist [Richard Florida](#) (<http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/07/geography-of-gun-deaths/69354/>) took a look at gun deaths and other social indicators, he found that higher populations, more stress, more

immigrants, and more mental illness didn't correlate with more gun deaths. But he did find one telling correlation: States with tighter gun control laws have fewer gun-related deaths.

Read more at Florida's "[The Geography of Gun Deaths](http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/01/the-geography-of-gun-deaths/69354/)." (<http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/01/the-geography-of-gun-deaths/69354/>)

Image credit: [Zara Matheson/Martin Prosperity Institute](http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/01/the-geography-of-gun-deaths/69354/) (<http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/01/the-geography-of-gun-deaths/69354/>)

er.php? 8 **Still,**
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gun homicides
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are declining:

The good news is that all firearm homicides, like all homicides and crime (<http://www.vox.com/cards/crime-rate-drop>), are on the decline. There's still a lot of debate among criminal justice experts about why this crime drop is occurring — some of the most credible ideas include mass incarceration, more and better policing, and reduced lead exposure from gasoline. But one theory that researchers have widely debunked is the idea that more guns have deterred crime (<http://www.vox.com/cards/crime-rate-drop>).

<http://www.vox.com/cards/crime-rate-drop/guns-prevent-crime>)

— in fact, the opposite may be true, based on research compiled by the [Harvard School of Public Health's Injury Control Center](#) (<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hicrc/firearms-research/guns-and-death/>).

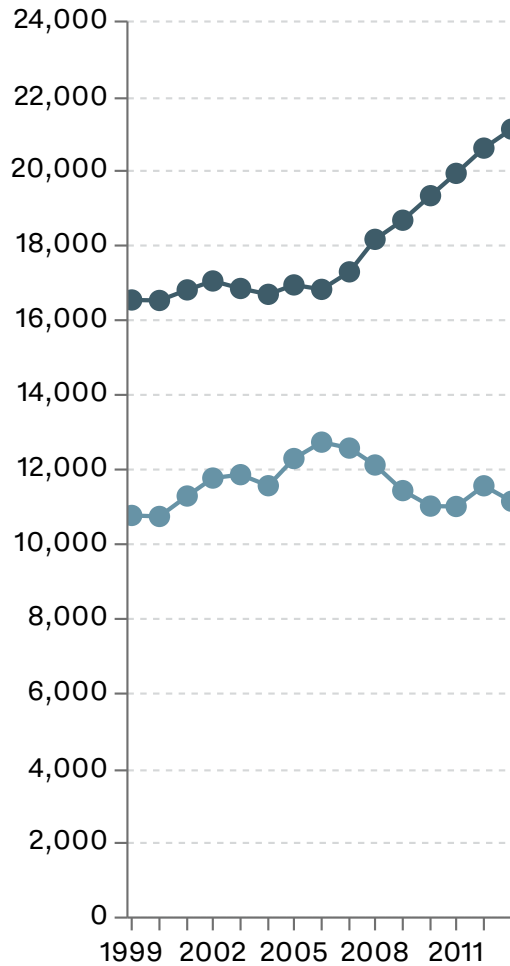
<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hicrc/firearms-research/guns-and-death/>).

Image credit: [Pew Research Center](#) (<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/05/07/gun-homicide-rate-down-49-since-1993-peak-public-unaware/>).

America's biggest gun problem is suicide

[er.php?9](#) **Most gun deaths are suicides**
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Firearm suicides versus homicides



Firearm homicides Firearm suicides

Source: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Although America's political debate about guns tends to

focus on grisly mass shootings and murders, a majority of gun-related deaths in the US are suicides. As Vox's Dylan Matthews (<http://www.vox.com/2015/6/3/8721267/gun-suicide-gun-control>) explained, this is actually one of the most compelling reasons for reducing access to guns — there is a lot of research (<http://www.vox.com/2015/6/3/8721267/gun-suicide-gun-control>) that shows greater access to guns dramatically increases the risk of suicide.

Image credit: German Lopez/Vox

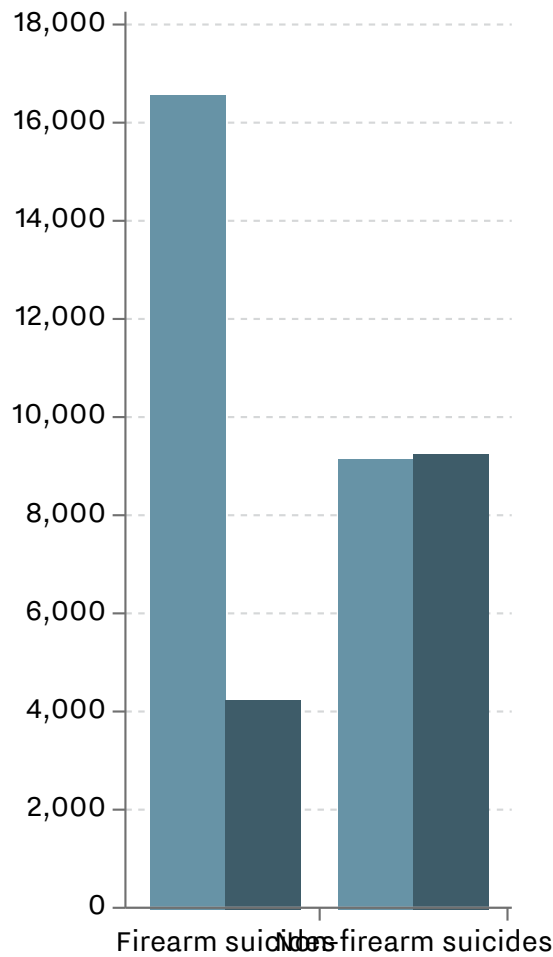
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The states with the most guns report the

most suicides

More guns, more suicides

Reported suicides between 2001 and 2005



States with highest rates of gun ownership
States with lowest rates of gun ownership

Source: ["Guns and Suicide in the United States"](#)

Image credit: German Lopez/Vox

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**Guns
allow
people
to kill
themselves
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Perhaps *the* reason access to guns so strongly contributes to suicides is that guns are much deadlier than alternatives like cutting and poison.

Jill Harkavy-Friedman, vice president of research for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (<https://www.afsp.org/>), previously

explained (<http://www.vox.com/2015/7/30/9068255/suicide-impulsive-gun-control>) that this

is why reducing access to guns can be so important to preventing suicides: Just stalling an attempt or making it less likely to result in death makes a huge difference.

"Time is really key to preventing suicide in a suicidal person," Harkavy-Friedman said. "First, the crisis won't last, so it will seem less dire and less hopeless with time. Second, it opens the opportunity for someone to help or for the suicidal person to reach out to someone to help. That's why limiting access to lethal means is so powerful."

She added, "[I]f we keep the method of suicide away from a person when they consider it, in that moment they will not switch to another method. It doesn't mean they never will. But in that moment, their thinking is very inflexible and

rigid. So it's not like they say, 'Oh, this isn't going to work. I'm going to try something else.' They generally can't adjust their thinking, and they don't switch methods."

Image credit: Estelle Caswell/Vox

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12 Programs that limit access to guns have decreased suicides

When countries reduced access to guns, they saw a drop in the number of firearm suicides. The data above, taken from a [paper](http://ftp.iza.org/dp4995.pdf) (<http://ftp.iza.org/dp4995.pdf>) published in the journal *IZA*, shows that suicides dropped dramatically after the Australian government set up a gun buyback program that reduced

the number of firearms in the country by about one-fifth.

Australia is far from alone in these types of results. A study (<http://www.gsoa.ch/media/medialibrary/2010/12/L>) from Israeli researchers found that suicides among Israeli soldiers dropped by 40 percent — particularly on weekends — when the military stopped letting soldiers take their guns home over the weekend.

This data and research have a clear message: States and countries can significantly reduce the number of suicides by restricting access to guns.

Image credit: Estelle Caswell/Vox

There are hundreds of police shootings every year in America

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Police have killed more than 100% of people)

**Shooting
of
Michael
Brown,
police
have
killed
more
than
1,100
people**

(<http://www.vox.com/a/police-shootings-ferguson-map>)

Since the August 9, 2014, police shooting of [Michael Brown](http://www.vox.com/cards/mike-brown-protests-ferguson-missouri) (<http://www.vox.com/cards/mike-brown-protests-ferguson-missouri>) in Ferguson, Missouri, police have killed at least 1,112 people, as [this map](http://www.vox.com/a/police-shootings-ferguson-map) (<http://www.vox.com/a/police-shootings-ferguson-map>) (click

to view the interactive version) shows.

Fatal Encounters (

<http://www.fatalencounters.org/>),

a nonprofit, has tracked these killings by collecting reports from the media, public, and law enforcement and verifying them through news reports. Some of the data is incomplete, with details about a victim's race, age, and other factors sometimes missing. It also includes killings that were potentially legally justified, and is likely missing some killings entirely.

A huge majority of the 1,112 deaths on the map are from gunshots, which is hardly surprising given that guns are so deadly compared with other tools used by police. There are also noticeable numbers of fatalities from vehicle crashes, stun guns, and asphyxiations. In some cases, people died from stab wounds, medical emergencies, and what's

called "suicide by cop," (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_by_cop) when people kill themselves by baiting a police officer into using deadly force.

Image credit: [Soo Oh/Vox](http://www.vox.com/a/police-shootings-ferguson-map) (<http://www.vox.com/a/police-shootings-ferguson-map>)

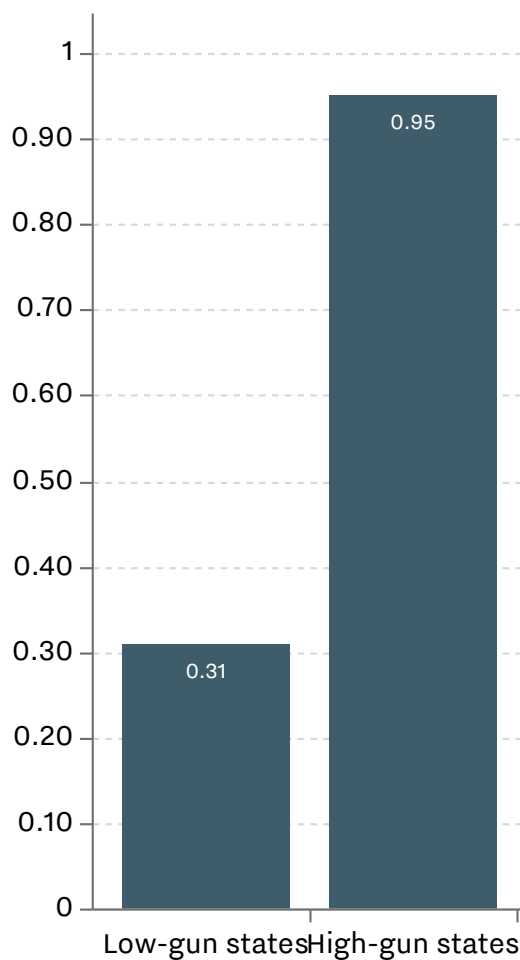
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**states
with
more
guns,
more
police
officers
are
also
killed
on
duty**

Police are more likely to be killed in

homicides in states with more guns

Homicides per 10,000 law enforcement officers



Source: ["Firearm Prevalence and Homicides of Law Enforcement Officers in the United States"](#)

Given that states with more guns tend to have more

homicides, it isn't too surprising that, as a study (<http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/A> in the *American Journal of Public Health* found, states with more guns also have more cops die in the line of duty.

Researchers looked at federal data for firearm ownership and homicides of police officers across the US over 15 years. They found that states with more gun ownership had more cops killed in homicides: Every 10 percent increase in firearm ownership correlated with 10 additional officers killed in homicides over the 15-year study period.

The findings could help explain why US police officers appear (<http://www.vox.com/2015/6/9/8751541/police-shootings-international>) to kill more people than cops in other developed countries. For US police officers, the higher rates of guns and gun violence — even against them — in America mean they not only will

encounter more guns and violence, but they can *expect* to encounter more guns and deadly violence, making them more likely to anticipate and perceive a threat and use deadly force as a result.

Image credit: German Lopez/Vox

America's political fight over guns

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Support

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Over the past 20 years, Americans have clearly shifted from supporting gun control measures to greater support of "protecting the right of Americans to own guns," according to [Pew Research Center surveys](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/09/a-public-opinion-trend-that-matters-priorities-for-gun-policy/) (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/09/a-public-opinion-trend-that-matters-priorities-for-gun-policy/>). This shift has happened even as major mass shootings, such as the attacks on Columbine High School and Sandy Hook Elementary School, have received more press attention.

Image credit: [Pew Research Center](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/09/a-public-opinion-trend-that-matters-priorities-for-gun-policy/) (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/09/a-public-opinion-trend-that-matters-priorities-for-gun-policy/>).

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High-profile shootings don't appear to lead to more support for gun control

Although mass shootings are often viewed as some of the worst acts of gun violence, they seem to have little effect on public opinion about gun rights. That helps explain why

Americans' support for the right to own guns appears to be rising over the past 20 years even as more of these mass shootings make it to the news.

Image credit: [Pew Research Center \(http://www.people-press.org/2012/07/30/views-on-gun-laws-unchanged-after-aurora-shooting/\)](http://www.people-press.org/2012/07/30/views-on-gun-laws-unchanged-after-aurora-shooting/)

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Although Americans say they want to protect the right to bear arms, they're very much supportive of many gun policy proposals — including some fairly contentious ideas, such as more background checks on private and gun show sales and banning semi-automatic and assault-style weapons.

This type of contradiction isn't exclusive to gun policy issues. For example, although most Americans say they don't like Obamacare (<http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/oban1130.html>), most of them do like the specific policies in the health-care law (<http://kff.org/health-reform/poll-finding/march-2013-tracking-poll/>). Americans just don't like some policy ideas until you get specific.

For people who believe the empirical evidence that more guns mean more violence, this contradiction is the source of a lot of frustration. Americans by

and large support policies that reduce access to guns. But once these policies are proposed, they're broadly spun by politicians and pundits into attempts to "take away your guns." So nothing gets done, and preventable deaths keep occurring.

Image credit: [Pew Research Center \(http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/09/a-public-opinion-trend-that-matters-priorities-for-gun-policy/\)](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/09/a-public-opinion-trend-that-matters-priorities-for-gun-policy/)
